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MACEDONIA

SUCCESS STORY

Opening the World to Disabled People

Organization is adapting computers and trainings to address their needs



Photo: Peace Corps/Dao Tran

Miki enjoys games and playing music on this computer adapted to his needs provided by a USAID-supported organization.

“Assistive technology and software makes handicaps irrelevant,” said Lidija Krstevska Dojchinovska, whose organization is providing computers accessible to disabled people.

Miki is nearly ready to start school, and like most kids, he’s both excited and nervous. He’s also crazy about computers.

But until recently, he didn’t get much of a chance to use one. Because this 9-year-old Macedonian boy has cerebral palsy, he needs special equipment and assistance. Through a USAID-supported non-governmental organization, Open the Windows, Miki is just one of many with disabilities who now has access to the world through specially equipped computers.

The center in Skopje that Miki visits is one of six assistive IT centers with trained staff and special computer hardware and software. “Assistive technology and software makes handicaps irrelevant,” said Lidija Krstevska Dojchinovska, of Open the Windows.

“Every person with special needs has a right to have access to information and knowledge — this is the foundation for education, employment, and better social integration,” she said.

The interactive software provided to the centers aims to help improve the user’s memory, concentration, attention, analysis and synthesis, and his or her ability to differentiate colors and forms. A variety of educational games is also included.

Miki uses a computer with enlarged icons on the desktop, captions, buttons and cursor. Miki can start up the computer by himself, open a game program, change it, and play music. The team working with Miki says he has developed better attention and focus. Miki says he’s just having fun.